

NAKED VULNERABILITIES: MINDFULNESS, HERMENEUTICS, AND  
PROFESSOR/STUDENT REALITIES:  
AN ETHICAL PRESENCE

Sharon G. Solloway, PH.D.  
Department of Early Childhood/Elementary Education  
Bloomsburg University  
Bloomsburg, PA USA

Please do not quote from this paper without permission from the author.

Presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting  
San Diego, CA  
April 2004

Correspondence should be directed to:

Dr. Sharon G. Solloway, Department of EC/ELED, Rm. 3165, McCormick Building, Bloomsburg University,  
Bloomsburg, PA 17815.

Email: [ssollowa@bloomu.edu](mailto:ssollowa@bloomu.edu)

## Introduction

While few classroom teachers have access to the current AERA *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, if they did they might be as surprised as I have been at the lack of research which addresses the very practical interruptions in the daily life of the classroom which work wrinkles into most methods and strategies. It is not a little known fact that most teachers find educational research less than helpful because in their view the research usually fails to account for the messiness of classroom practice—the bumpiness of the individual desires, needs, and fantasies of teachers and students. This often unrecognized and unacknowledged bumpiness fires mismatches between the best efforts of teachers and students to accommodate one another in the classroom (Britzman, 1998; Ellsworth, 1997). What is needed is research that provides insight into the ways teachers can address that bumpiness; research that addresses the quality of the teacher's presence as an ethical interference in that atmosphere of potential misfires (Kessler, 1991, 1999; Lepuschitz, 1991; O'Reilley, 1998; Solloway, 2001, 2000, 1999a, 1999b).

### Mindfulness: Ethical Interferences

Mindfulness practice most simply stated is non-judgmental awareness—awareness of what you are doing while you are doing it. Although the value of non-judgmental attention goes against common understandings of competence as the driving force in effective classroom practice, the benefits of this quality of attention for effecting greater connections between student needs and teacher responses have been the discovery of teacher practitioners. The mindfulness practitioner is instructed to keep all attention focused only on the contents of experience in the present moment. This means leaving the baggage of past or future, constructions of language, or social contexts out of the experience of the moment. At first glance this seems impossible. But, what is discovered is that even a novice suddenly finds themselves free to just “see” what is there before habits of language and experience form thoughts and *those thoughts* become what is real.

This effort to leave habitual ways of seeing aside for the moment illuminates an intersection of Eastern practices of mindfulness and Western traditions of hermeneutics. In both traditions the momentary “letting go” or “forgetting” of self's desire to know eliminates obstructions to the interactive play of differences (Bankhart, 1997; Epstein, 1998; Gadamer, 1976, 1960/1997; Gunaratana, 1993; Helminski, 1992; Krishnamurti, 1981; Jardine, 1992; Lao Tsu, 1972; Miller, 1994; Smith, 1999, 1991). Difference is neither ignored nor used as a source of dominance. Rather difference is attended to with heightened consciousness—the creative energy for community and justice respectful of the ambiguities of body, mind, soul, and spirit (O'Reilley, 1998). This particular quality of attention evokes a kind of presence that as much as possible is created out of a “de-condition[ed] mind and spirit” (Kesson, 2000, p. 93). Such a quality of awareness makes it possible to “transform life—to create more harmony in it and to liberate the psychic energy that would otherwise be wasted in boredom and worry” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 42). Recent work by Zhu (2001) suggests that when teachers are in a “flow” their

students report being “cognitively involved”—simultaneously. Mindfulness shows potential for enhancing the quality of life for both teacher and student in the classroom.

Education that seeks to standardize and categorize students’ individual journeys is an education that opens more wounds than it heals because what is eliminated is an educational journey that fails to address *how* we know in favor of emphasizing *what* we know thus nourishing the multidimensional nature of the learner. As Tobin (2004) explains

Contemporary schools emphasize both rational and sensory knowing. The rational involves calculation, explanation, and analysis; the sensory lives off of observation and measurement. Together these form the rational-empirical approach that has set the standard for knowledge across most disciplines. However, another way of knowing—contemplation—has been recognized across time, culture, and disciplines as essential to the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom, yet it remains absent from today’s curriculum and pedagogy. Contemplative knowing is a missing link, one that affects student performance, character, and depth of understanding. (p. 28)

Students are multidimensional beings and a pedagogy that delights rather than spurns that multidimensionality is what I would like to call depth pedagogy. Depth pedagogy mindfully enacts an ethical interference in the current efforts to make individual students’ educational journeys a series of rank and rate hurdles which measure *what* you know through rational and sensory knowing only. My own efforts include working to make the assessment practices in my classroom less about transmitted information and more about transformational opportunities (McVarish & Solloway, 2002; Solloway & Brooks, 2004).

Sensitive to the effects on students of the continual onslaught of teacher education’s efforts to rank and order students as well as fill teacher education programs with course work that focuses on theory and methods without a balance of course work supporting the inner life of the teacher, I seek to express my concern regarding these issues through a pedagogy which mindfully crafts course experiences which nurture their inner lives as well as provide learning opportunities for expertise in the theory and methods for supporting elementary students into literacy competencies. As I work to make assessment more of a transformational experience, I have moved to another section of my course, which has a traditional research assignment. I have tried to extend this assignment to include an alternative research option, which supports the opportunity for transformation. The result is an assignment with two options—one offers the opportunity to explore the effects of the mindfulness practice on everyday life, while the second follows traditional research formats for exploring texts on a chosen topic. Both have the intent of providing the opportunity for self-discovery that lends itself to translation into classroom practice.

### Designing Mindfulness Practice into a Teacher Education Course

Contemplative practices and mindfulness practice are often associated. Jack Miller’s (1994) work stands as a hallmark for charting a path for contemplative practice and mindfulness in modern education. His work as well as that of others establishes the value of contemplative practice as a support for mindfulness practice in the classroom.

Following in his footsteps, my own research (Solloway, 1999a) confirmed that breath meditation enhanced the capacity of teachers pre-school through high school for mindfulness practice in the classroom in rural, inner-city, public and private schools. What has been less explored in education are the effects of practicing mindfulness without the support of a contemplative practice. Ellen Langer's (1989) work addresses mindfulness practice but does so expressly disassociating it from any connection with spirituality or spiritual practices. As a researcher, contemplative practitioner, and teacher educator, I do not want to approach mindfulness in that spirit even though I am in a public education institution and public education historically prefers to conflate "spiritual" with religion.

### *Spirit and Spiritual*

Spiritual experience transforms life. And, yet, the words "spirit" and "spiritual" have not found a home in public education curriculum. This is true, even though, it is common for human beings to associate "spirit" and "spiritual" with accounts of survival and often more mundane events of life. Diverse human beings across all cultures write poetry, narratives and stories which attest to the infusion of meaning and purpose that "spirit" and "spiritual" bring to their personal explanations of what it means to be alive. Other diverse human beings across all cultures attest to the meaning and purpose they experience in their own lives by listening to or reading that poetry, those narratives and/or stories.

Both James Moffett (1994) and Dwayne Hubner (1985/1999) eloquently explore the way we have conflated "spirit" and "spiritual" with religious practices and thus forbidden their presence in public school work. They note that while we may absent "spirit" and "spiritual" from the curriculum, it is impossible to absent them from the lives of our students or ourselves. Each suggests that the universality of the experience of "spirit" and "spiritual" permits us to loose their ties to any one particular tradition and thereby recognize their central presence in all of life.

Huebner (1985/1999) urges us to look to the common use of "spirit" as noted by the Oxford English Dictionary. The Latin root of "spirit" is "breath" or "breathing." Spirit might be called the "life force" which animates the material body. Indeed, spirit suggests that there is more than what is present. For example, when someone achieves or goes beyond the usual, we say they have "spirit." Spirit makes possible something more than is currently present. Spirit in this sense is the anchor of hope in the "moreness" (p. 344) of life. In other words,

"Spirit" refers to that which gives vitality, that which gives life, not merely to the forms of life. It indicates that life is more. Or can be more, than the forms in which it is currently lived... To be "inspired" by someone is to go beyond the usual. To "have spirit" is to be in touch with forces or aspects of life that make it possible and unimagined—to the possibility of new ways, new knowledge, new relationships, new awareness. Spirit refers to that which makes it possible to acknowledge that present forms of life—the institutions, relationships, symbols, language habits—cannot contain the human being... This going beyond, this "moreness" of life, this

transcendent dimension is the usual meaning of “spirit” and “spiritual.”  
(pp. 343, 344)

As we become cognizant of our artificial, but real, entanglements of “spirit” and “spiritual,” we see that we can articulate their life affirming principles without conflating those principles with “God talk” (p. 344).

To be spiritual, then, means to be open to” awareness that what we are and what we know can never completely contain what we might be or what we might know” (Huebner, 1985/1999, p. 345). In this sense, to be spiritual means we permit ourselves to be vulnerable to those particular experiences that would otherwise be closed to us when we filter experience through our habits of language and conditioned response. To be spiritual is to move awareness into the in-between spaces where the not/thought dwells. It is mindful presence negotiated as play in the in-between spaces that frees us to see the other possibilities of things before we use language to constrict and construct them. This mindful presence brought to everyday experience is the acknowledgement of “spirituality” which I do not want to exclude from my teacher education courses.

### *Mindfulness One Day A Week*

Thich Nhat Hanh in *The Miracle of Mindfulness* suggests that even those who have an active meditation practice and a commitment to mindfulness as a daily practice find that dedicating a day specifically to mindfulness elevates their understanding of the practice which spills over into other days. Further, he suggests that three months of this practice will produce significant changes in one’s life, “The day of mindfulness will begin to penetrate the other days of the week, enabling you to eventually live seven days a week in mindfulness,” (Hahn, 1976, p. 31). The positive effects of mindfulness for enhanced quality of life have been well documented (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Epstein, 1998; Goleman, 2003; Hahn, 1976; Kabat-Zin, 1990; Palmer, 1998). Would the practice of mindfulness one day a week for eight weeks open pre-service teachers to an enhanced quality of life?

To explore this question, I designed a mindfulness research option into one of my teacher education courses (Appendix A). Students are provided with a simple description of mindfulness: Anchoring non-judgmental attention in the present moment—witnessing your internal and external experience non-judgmentally. Students are instructed to choose one day a week for eight weeks as their mindfulness day. During that day they are to use either their breath or a slight smile as their anchor in the present moment. The breath or smile is to be used each time they realize their attention was wandered from the present moment to bring attention back. It is emphasized that this is the practice no matter how many times attention wanders and that mindfulness is a very gentle practice. The wandering of attention is just noted rather than negatively noted and then immediately brought back to the present moment to witness experience non-judgmentally. At the end of each mindfulness day the student is to write an electronic journal entry to the professor in which the day’s experience is recounted in terms of what it was like to be mindful, to use the breath or slight smile as an anchor—how was the day different as a result of mindfulness. At the end of the eight weeks, the student writes a one-page reflection on

the experience. The incentive to choose the Mindfulness Research Option lies in the alternative research option which has a much more onerous rubric for success.

## Results: In Their Own Words

### *Things Never Noticed Before*

Students often reported heightened sense awareness on their mindfulness days. Walking across campus became journeys through new territory as ornamentations on buildings passed everyday stood out as if they had only appeared today or songs of birds seemed to abound where there had only been silence before. One student said it this way

I stared at things across campus I had never noticed before and it made me feel like I was in a whole new place. I was very surprised at the details on the buildings I had never noticed before. I heard birds chirping. I never heard that before walking to class.

The satisfaction which heightened sense awareness brings was noted. For example,

I seemed to be more observant. It seems so satisfying just to notice how the covers lay across the bed, the texture of my cat's fur...the way my clothes hang in the closet.

Being present in the moment had me notice sights, sounds, and feelings that I normally would not have paid much attention to. I was packing my belongings to move out of my apartment. I found this to be an opportune time to acknowledge awareness of the memories that I came across as I packed...it was satisfying and peaceful. [Mindfulness] is helping my transition to be more peaceful.

When I'm mindful, feelings are intensified...I felt an excitement inside because I finished really hard math problems, and that excitement bubbled over as I let myself feel this moment...The feeling was great!...mindfulness lets me really see, feel, smell, taste, and touch the good things and the bad things.

While taking care of the individuals for whom I work (clients in a psychiatric facility), I noticed a sense of my attention being more deliberate in their direction than usual. It was satisfying to just settle my attention on each thing I did for them.

My great aunt has the early warning signs of Alzheimer's and needed to be admitted into the hospital on Thursday. My sister and I decided to visit her on Friday and spend time with her so she wouldn't be alone in her room. I knew what my aunt looked like, but today I decided to really look at her. I noticed new things about her that I hadn't realized like a birthmark on her face I never noticed. I thought it would be terrible to see her like that, but I felt very peaceful while I was there and even when I left.

One of the most clarifying moments of my day came early in the evening when I decided to go for a jog. Being completely aware of the sidewalk under my feet and concentrating on my breaths as they became faster and deeper put my day into perspective. It felt satisfying to stay focused on just one thing and pay attention to how I was feeling.

### *Less Stress*

One of the most common themes was that of the effects of mindfulness practice on the experience of stress and relaxation. Students found that mindfulness practice acted as a stress reducer and a relaxation enhancer.

...noticed mindfulness to be a great stress reducer. In stressful situations, I find myself more aware of the experience that I am in and the feelings that I am experiencing, helping me to deal with the situation in a more productive way than before.

Today I really did appreciate the aspect of mindfulness that relieves anxiety. Mindfulness makes a large task seem not so overwhelming. Well today brought a different kind of anxiety that was well handled by this mindfulness. My dad told me that my mom was at the heart doctor because my family doctor found something. She had to go to the hospital and get it looked at, just to make sure. Now, normally I would panic and cry. But today I didn't make any assumptions of predictions about what will happen. This helped me a great deal.

I got the news that my grandfather was not expected to live. It was my mindfulness day so I decided to live in the moments of the day instead of worrying. Being mindful allowed for me to not worry or be anxious over something I had no control over. I lived in the moments of the day without thinking about all the bad things that could happen to him.

Trying to be mindful is very hard for me, however, after today I felt less stressed because I wasn't constantly thinking about everything at the same time.

I would say that I felt more relaxed while I was mindful. Focusing on the moment relieved me of anxieties that come with constantly thinking about what I have to do after class or before I go to sleep. When the moment came, I took care of what I needed to in that moment. Everything that needed to get done, got done but with a great deal of less stress.

### *Joy in Ordinary Tasks/Events*

The theme of surprised by the joy of ordinary tasks/events was also a common theme throughout the journals. Students expressed surprise and delight in discovering joy in common everyday occurrences like dressing or eating or brushing your teeth.

As I was taking a shower I never realized I could concentrate so much on washing my hair and body, because normally I am going over the events of my upcoming day. I really appreciated the warm water over my body and the feel of my soft, clean hair. When I started eating breakfast, I took another breath and said stay in the moment. I usually eat my breakfast unconsciously I think, because yesterday I actually tasted the sweetness of my orange juice and the delicious grape flavor of the jelly on my bagel. Then when I brushed my teeth I could feel every bristle in every crack. It felt like something important was happening. I felt happy. I know it sounds weird but that's what happened.

I was able to appreciate each detail of the sun rise[sic] and paid attention to what I was feeling as I watched. It was so weird because I actually felt happier and smiled a little unconsciously just by seeing the sky brighten. As strange as it sounds, I really noticed a sense of joy as I breathed in the warm breeze and squinted my eyes in the sunlight.

I began to take notice of even the smallest task such as breathing as an enjoyable activity.

...the moments of the day that I am mindful, I find myself at peace almost. It feels as though the only thing that matters at that moment is what I am doing. Nothing that happened in the past, or nothing I plan to do/worry about in the future can get in the way of the present. It is actually a nice feeling.

As I went to the library for a group meeting I found myself drifting to my plans for the weekend while I was waiting for my group. I took another breath and came back to the moment. I felt more relaxed just sitting there trying not to think of all the things I would have to do in the following days. I felt the spring sun trying to peak out of the clouds onto my legs, and it warmed me up inside. I felt joy.

Before I talked to my dad, as I do every Wednesday night, I took another breath to get back into the moment. I felt satisfied while I was talking with him because I heard every word he said. Normally I hear most of his words, but some words are also from TV that I was watching. I felt good that I gave him my full attention.

One of the more overwhelming moments for me occurred at work when I was giving a bottle to one of the newborns. Just focusing all of my attention on this child and being aware of him breathing and moving as I held him made me feel peaceful and happy. It made me aware of the little things I miss everyday when I'm hustling and bustling around.

### *Sense of Awe and Wonder in Ordinary Experiences*

Akin to joy in ordinary experiences is the experience of awe and wonder. Students wrote that mindfulness practice imbued their ordinary activities with something that gave them pause—pause in awe of the multi-faceted be-jewelled nature of a moment. The experiences ranged from parades to the news of a beloved grandfather's death. But in each it is as if they stood in each of these moments caught in the wonder of life shimmerings.

I took notice of everything going on throughout the parade and really had an appreciation of every little detail...from the smiles on little kids' faces, to the sounds from the bands, to clowns dancing on the street...I was struck by the vibes of happiness I could feel from everybody around me and it gave me great energy.

My mom called to tell me my grandfather just died. As I took my breath and brought myself back into the moment, the moment was a tear sliding, tickling, down my cheek. I felt the individual little hairs on my cheek touched...it seemed to last forever as the tear slid down over my cheekbone, to my lower jaw and dropped off the end of my face. It was an amazing and comforting experience.

I found myself smiling, just looking at my dog [running freely in a field] and really feeling the happiness that she felt just running.

One thing that struck me to be amazing was that for the first time since she [1 year old niece] was born, I actually took time to enjoy watching her. I found myself standing back and simply enjoy her playing by herself. At one moment, I actually brought tears to my eyes because I was taken back by the simplicity of her just "being."

I realized today how much I take things for granted; for example, the smell of my pizza coming out of the oven. It was refreshing and it make me feel happy as funny as it sounds.

At work I was just focusing all of my attention on this child and being aware of him breathing and moving as I held him. It made me aware of how often I must have missed this every day when I'm jostling and bustling around.

I always hated snow, but just to sit back and enjoy it was a totally different experience. I watched it hit the ground and eventually pile up into a beautiful white surrounding. I really never realized how relaxing it would be if you just think about it then and not worry about its effects later.

I normally would have thought today a gloomy day because of the clouds, but walking and concentrating on the light rain that was falling on me, I realized it was a great day! I liked the way the rain hit me ever so softly.

I realized how much I enjoy the sound of gravel between the road and my sneaker.

I sat and just watched the sunlight reflect off the ripples and was caught up like I was in all that beauty.

A snowflake landed on my eyelash. My first instinct was to wipe it away, but then I noticed that it was at the exact spot that I could see all of its different characteristics for a few short seconds before it melted. I think on a normal day I would have ignored that little delight.

I noticed myself looking at the seagulls. Then I felt as if I was feeling what they were feeling soaring up there in the air.

We were cutting shooting lanes for deer season. I don't even know how to describe it but just by focusing on what I was doing and even just the sound of the chainsaw, it was just a really, really cool and awesome feeling. Then we set up targets and shot our guns. Thus was unreal. I was so focused on every move I made, from aiming through the scope to clutching the gun tight and slowly pulling the trigger. It was almost like everything was in slow motion.

Doing chores around the house usually makes me mad. Today I just concentrated on each thing that I was doing. Each time I felt happiness that made me smile, like when I thought, "I'm cleaning the bathroom," and then just felt myself doing it, and then just find myself smiling. It really made me feel good about my existence. I know that sounds weird but that's what happened.

I sat on the shore looking off the island onto the mainland and felt a sense of peace come over me and just enjoyed being there at that moment in time. Being at complete peace with myself was an amazing feeling.

One new thing is that when I went to a family dinner just giving my relatives hugs was a new experience. The hugs felt more personal, and I felt the other person's body heat. I also felt like I felt their love for me when I was hugged.

I always feel spiritual in church but for the first time, I truly felt like I was feeling being at church.

### *Self-Discovery*

Mindfulness practice allowed the students to become witnesses to their own habits and the contents of consciousness. Often it seemed that they were seeing themselves for the first time. Whether the discoveries were affirming or windows into habits they were surprised to discover in themselves, each opened doors to new visions for themselves.

I had not realized how intuitive I am...[When I'm mindful] I can read people's body language much clearer than normal.

I never realized how much I let my mind drift off in class...how much of my day is filled with unconscious actions.

Today...I only allowed myself to think about one thing at a time, and I thought deeply about it. I have a niece and nephew whom I adore but I haven't really been able to spend a lot of time with. Today I thought deeply about ways I can find time to see them. I thought about my own daughter and raising her, I analyzed how I am bringing her up and then I thought of ways I could improve. My point being that I really enjoyed focusing my thoughts and it felt like being mindful was teaching me to be more insightful.

My friends always tell me that I worry too much, after today I noticed I really do. Whether I was at work, in my car, brushing my teeth, or even in class, I was always catching myself not being mindful and most of the time it was because my mind had drifted into worrying about something.

One thing that I noticed is that usually I'm so self-conscious but when I was being mindful I don't worry about what others are thinking or doing. I never knew I could not be self-conscious.

I noticed how nice silence and darkness can be after a busy day. I'm not sure if I ever really just sat in silence and didn't think about anything but that silence.

## *Conversations*

Many students witnessed the quality of their listening and found it wanting. Others discovered that mindfulness practice enhanced the quality of their listening. Tobin (2004) noted three kinds of listening, “*Passive listening* involves casual attention; *active listening* involves intentional focus and skills such as paraphrasing and summarizing what another has said...A third kind of listening...deep listening.” (p.36). Deep listening involves intently experiencing what is heard without the need to do anything about what is heard. Deep listening allows the listener to witness themselves as a listener as well as generates empathy and more intuitive empathetic understanding. The listener feels a greater connection to the person speaking.

The most shocking thing I became aware of during this mindfulness experience is that I am not as attentive to people while I am talking to them as I thought I was.

I found myself listening to people differently. I didn't give much feedback when others were talking to me, which is the opposite for what I usually do. I let them talk and just listened. It was a strange feeling sort of like just peaceful.

Normally I just listen and give her [her mother] little signs that I'm paying attention, but this time I read between what she said and did not. I was able to draw conclusions about what she did not tell me, nor really want me to see.

I am a much better listener and communicator on my mindfulness days because I am giving my full attention to the present situation. Tonight I really listened to my husband. I feel like I heard every word he said, compared to when I need him to repeat himself because I didn't hear something or if I've only caught the beginning of his story because my mind drifts elsewhere. It was a good feeling.

I found myself paying closer attention to what the children at work were saying. Not only was I paying attention to what they were saying, but also to how they were saying it. I was able to read deeper into what they were saying and it led me to make inferences on how they were feeling. I felt like we were in something together the whole time I was at work.

I was talking to my grandmother. I could tell that she realized how focused I was on her and how interested I was and that seemed to make the experience more enjoyable for both of us. She seemed more interested in what I had to say as much as I was in what she had to say.

I was really listening to what she was saying and paying attention to her [her roommate]. I felt more involved in our conversation than I do when I'm not being mindful.

My boyfriend was talking about sports. He always talks about sports but usually I just think about something else. But since I was practicing mindfulness I really listened. I saw how much I cared about him. Then I asked him about something what he said. He wanted to know what I needed to know that because he had talked about that before. I explained to him that I really never really listened or cared before about sports and that now I still did not care about sports but that I was listening because I cared about him. When I saw his happy reaction to this comment, I saw that being mindful to what others have to say not only affects me, but also those around me.

I listened to everything the kids said and paid attention to everything. I began to notice characteristics about them that I haven't before just because I was in tune with them.

Being mindful today made me feel more mature and calm, even if my mom and I did not always agree. I realized what a special bond a mother and daughter have. Later, after I had gone back to school and my mom went home, she called me to say she had had a wonderful day with me. She never does that.

### *Anger Management*

Several students reported an effect of mindfulness practice as an "anger management" technique. Mindfulness defused their anger. They were able to detach themselves from their anger enough to see it without being engulfed by it. Then they were able to choose a response instead of being sucked into a reactive response. As a result, they experienced more peace and better solutions.

One thing that stood out was my roommate and I got into an argument and I was really mad. I remembered that I was supposed to just feel everything so I did. Everything seemed to calm down and I could see how we could figure this out.

While I was momentarily annoyed [with the professor going off on a tangent relating to his personal life which had nothing to do with the course] by that and various other things today, I found a benefit of mindfulness is that anger leaves quickly. I don't dwell on things because they are in the past...what a great thing! I wish I could have known that earlier in my life!

...this technique [mindfulness practice] really calmed me...it was almost like an anger management technique as well...instead of getting upset about the little things today, I found myself saying “just forget it”. As I was encountered with bad situations, I would concentrate on the “here and now” and the bad thoughts just drifted away. I would listen to my breathing and it really helped.

[Young boy in classroom has a jar of maple syrup in his backpack, which opens and spills on the textbook inside.] Instead of completely flipping out and getting angry and yelling, I calmly told the boy to take his backpack to the bathroom and wash it off. I then helped him clean it up off the floor and the desk.

I hit some traffic on I 80 because of an accident, which usually pisses me off. Instead of getting frustrated and weaving in and out of traffic to try to get ahead, I just relaxed and went with the flow.

### *Accomplish More*

Another benefit of mindfulness practice reported by my students is the sense of getting more accomplished than they do on non-mindfulness day. This includes school work as well as performance at their various jobs.

...being mindful made the work go by quicker. I was able to focus more and get the work done faster even on irrelevant tasks like organizing my calendar.

I found myself at work being able to focus better on what I had to do, and was able to accomplish things better. The other people around me I was blocking out for the most part. When I was in the moment, my body was relaxed and moving on its own.

I had to work all day Saturday at [name of local restaurant]. I decided to make Saturday my mindfulness day. I thought it might be hard to be mindful during work, but it only helped me to be a better waitress. I was able to give each of my tables all my attention, rather than thinking about everything else going on while I was at the table. I remembered the things my customers needed, and a lot of times got the stuff they wanted before they even had time to ask. I was really tuned into each person at every table, and their needs, wants and preferences. It was much less stressful to just be at a table, and worry about them, and nothing else for that moment...I really was a good night, and I have to admit I left work smiling and not just because my tips were so good. I just felt good all over. I got home and did my new favorite thing while being mindful...lay down in silence and just be in all that silence.

I find myself to be more understanding and self-motivated when I am focused on the moment and not thinking about other things. I know what I am supposed to accomplish and how well I should accomplish it.

The first thing mindfulness helped to do was play tennis. I'm not the best player, but it seemed that I was "in the zone." It seemed that I was making shots that I never was able to make before. My roommate was even making comments on how good I was playing.

### *Mindfulness Spilling Over to Non-Mindfulness Days*

Many journals contain at least one reference to the fact that mindfulness is not just something the student does on mindfulness days. The practice crops up on other days.

Even today when I was driving and it wasn't my day of mindfulness, I found myself paying more attention to what I was doing.

Now that I am practicing being mindful, I do not only do it one day a week, but whenever I really need to concentrate.

### Conclusion

The practice of mindfulness for one day a week opened my students to enhanced qualities of life. Their self-reports point to a discovery of mindfulness as a trigger for personal presence as an ethical interference in the often-unrecognized unethical social contexts in which we live. If we define "personal presence as an ethical interference" as a presence that seeks to do the least harm, then mindfulness practice one day a week for these students opened them to such possibilities. Their presence not only to others but also to themselves became more nourishing, nurturing, and most of all less harmful. While not all of them made connections between the transformations they were experiencing and their future classroom practices, the fact that some did demonstrates that on their own students are able to recognize benefits of mindfulness practice in the classroom. These two entries from different individuals suggest the transformation in personal presence as an ethical interference which each recognized as valuable not only in the present but also as a vision for themselves as classroom teachers.

My friend was telling me about a problem that she was having. I would have normally interjected with thoughts I had about it, but I decided to instead listen to everything she had to say fully and ignore all tendencies to provide help. As soon as she would say something, I would keep my thoughts to myself and I found it interesting that more often than not, she would tell me just what I was thinking to tell her. Without my interruptions, she was more able to provide me with a detailed story and many of the questions I was going to ask her were answered for me. I tried

this technique many more times today and found that I had much more engaging conversations than normal.

This made me think of teaching and me in my own classroom someday, because often teachers rush students to get to the point when they are telling about something. This taught me to sit back, focus on their thoughts and hesitate to correct or question. This way, the student gets the chance to self correct[sic] or use their words to further explain. I am working hard to use this method on a daily basis.

Today for the first time I was mindful on a day when I was tutoring at Danville...I couldn't believe how much it really helped me to not only be a better listener to the fluency of the students reading, but it also helped me to anticipate when each child was either getting bored or getting antsy with what we were working on. Because of the absences of some of my students we are constantly attempting to play catch up and today through being mindful of their moods, looks, and work, I was able to push them to get a lot of reading and working with words done without frustrating them with the amount of work I was giving them. Using mindfulness with these students made me think about when I have my own classroom. I want to be able to judge whether or not my students are having trouble or that they are frustrated with something that we are working on during class. I now see mindfulness as a way for you to be more sensitive to what the child is really saying not just by what they are saying. It also makes you more sensitive to their behaviors, the way they're acting, or even facial expressions. You can judge more quickly and more intuitively what they need.

My work is an ongoing project of learning how to live life richly—meaning learning to create more harmony for myself and others by living mindfully in each moment as often as possible. It is just incidental that my profession is teaching/learning alongside my students. How to translate “learning to live life richly/mindfully” into learning environments in which, both of us engage, sometimes collaboratively, sometimes independently, in the ongoing exploratory journey of how to live life richly/mindfully is my overarching task. My daily task is to find ways to use the externally imposed standards of professional organizations and governments as well as the content of the curriculum as vehicles for this life-long, life-enriching exploration.

The work of the teacher is no less the work of the student no less the work of being human—Our work is about learning how to live life richly/mindfully—meaning learning to create more harmony for ourselves and others by the way we choose to create our presence moment to moment. As teachers who mindfully teach, we use the content of our subjects as vehicles for this life-long, life-enriching moment to moment creation of presence as a quality of least harm to ourselves and others.

## Final Thoughts

### Mindfulness as an Ethical Interference: A Presence of Ethics

Mindfulness practice has the power to enact presence as an ethical interference; the intention is to enact the least harmful presence possible. Mindfulness as an ethical interference enacts what I want to call personal presence as depth pedagogy. Mindfulness as an ethical interference enacts a presence that recognizes and repairs the wounds education opens in the name of teaching and learning. This recognition and repair begins first in witnessing one's own unethical responses to others and enacting change on the spot. This effort to "see differently" and respond with ethical change offers the pre-service teacher as well as the veteran teacher the opportunity to transfer this practice to classroom practice enacting a presence to themselves and to others that seeks to do the least harm. This effort to "see differently" and respond with an ethical presence offers the pre-service teacher as well as the veteran teacher the opportunity to enact his or her presence as an ethical interference in classroom practice creating sacred spaces of least harm in the teaching/learning journey—moment by moment creations of spaces of ethical presence.

### References

- Bankhart, C. P. (1997). *Talking cures: A history of Western and Eastern psychotherapies*. Albany, NY: Brooks/Cole Publishing.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: HarperPerennial.
- Ellsworth, E. (1997). *Teaching positions*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Epstein, M. (1998). *Going to pieces without falling apart: A Buddhist perspective on wholeness*. New York: Broadway Books.
- Gadamer, H. G. (1975). *Truth and method*. New York: The Seabury Press.
- Goleman, D. (2003). *Destructive emotions: How can we overcome them?* New York: Bantam Books.
- Goleman, D. (1998). *Working with emotional intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Gunaratana, H. (1993). *Mindfulness in plain English*. Boston: Wisdom.
- Hahn, T. N. (1999). *The miracle of mindfulness*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Hart, T. (2004). Opening the contemplative mind in the classroom. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 2(3): 28-46.
- Huebner, D. E. (1985/1999). Spirituality and Knowing. In V. Hillis (Ed.), *The lure of the transcendent: Collected essays by Dwayne E. Heubner* (pp.23-35). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. (Original work published 1985)
- Jardine, D. (1992). Reflections on education, hermeneutics, and ambiguity: Hermeneutics as a restoring of life to its original difficulty. In W. F. Pinar & W. M. Reynolds (Eds.), *Understanding curriculum as phenomenological and deconstructed text* (pp. 116-130). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Kabat-Zin, J. (1990). *Full catastrophe living: Using the wisdom of your body and mind to face stress, pain, and illness*. New York: Dell.
- Kessler, R. (1999). Nourishing students in secular schools. *Educational Leadership*, 56(4), 49-52

- Kessler, S. (1991). The teaching presence. *Holistic Education Review*, Winter, 4-15.
- Krishnamurti, J. (1981). *Education and the significance of life*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Langer, E. J. (1989). *Mindfulness*. New York: Addison-Wesley.
- Lepuschitz, J. (1991). *Transpersonal theory and education*. Unpublished dissertation, Oklahoma State University at Stillwater.
- McVarish, J., & Solloway, S. 2002. Self-evaluation: Creating a classroom without unhealthy competitiveness. *The Educational Forum* 6(3):253-261.
- Miller, J. (1994a). *The contemplative practitioner: Meditation in education and the professions*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Moffett, J. 1994. *The universal schoolhouse: Spiritual awakening through education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- O'Reilly, M. R. (1998). *Radical presence: Teaching as contemplative practice*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers.
- Parker, P. J. (1998). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Smith, D. G. (1991). Hermeneutic inquiry: The hermeneutic imagination and the pedagogic text. In E. C. Short (Ed.), *Forms of curriculum inquiry* (pp. 187-209). Albany: SUNY.
- Smith, D. G. (1999). *Pedagon: Interdisciplinary essays in the human sciences, pedagogy and culture*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Solloway, S., & Brooks, N. J. (2004). Philosophical hermeneutics and assessment: Discussions of assessment for the sake of wholeness. *Journal of Thought*, 39(2), pp. 43-60.
- Solloway, S. (2001). Mindfulness, the hermeneutic imagination and jouissance: Action inquiry and transformations in classroom practice. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 17(4), 155-170.
- Solloway, S. (2000). Contemplative practitioners: The project of thinking gaze differently. *Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice*, 13(3), 30-42.
- Solloway, S. (1999a). *Teachers as contemplative practitioners: Presence, meditation, and mindfulness as a classroom practice*. Unpublished dissertation, Oklahoma State University at Stillwater, Oklahoma.
- Solloway, S. (1999b). The contemplative practitioner: The full presence of the professor in the teacher education classroom. *The Journal of the Oklahoma Association of Teacher Educators*, 3, 36-48.
- Zhu, N. Q. (2001). *The effects of teachers' flow experiences on the cognitive engagement of students*. Unpublished dissertation, University of San Diego at San Diego, California.

**Appendix A**  
**Research Options**  
**Spring 2004**

The research options for this assignment reflect the teacher's need for ongoing inquiries into both the "doing" and "being" of the profession. "Being" focuses on inquiries in the inner-life of the teacher; constantly developing more refined capacities for heightened awareness in classroom practice. "Doing" includes inquiries, which focus on constantly developing more effective content, processes, and structures in the classroom. Teaching is as much "being" as it is "doing."

**By Tuesday, Jan. 27, you will sign-up for either Research Option 1 or Research Option 2. There will be a sign-up sheet in your Group Folder.**

❖ **Research Option 1--Being: Study of Personal Efficacy of Mindfulness for Teachers**

Mindfulness: Being fully conscious that you are doing whatever you are doing. "When walking, be conscious that you are walking. When sitting, be conscious you are sitting. No matter what you are doing, your thoughts are only thinking about what is happening in the moment. There is no room left in consciousness for thoughts about anything that is not present in the moment...when you are brushing your teeth you are concentrating on the feeling of the brush in your hand, the movement across your teeth, the taste of the toothpaste...etc. When you discover that your thoughts have strayed away from what is happening in the present moment (this will happen frequently during your "Mindfulness Day"), you just 1) smile to yourself or 2) take a long, slow breath and let that smile or breath be a reminder to get your thoughts back to what is happening in the present moment. No matter how many times your thoughts stray during the day, each time you recognize that they have strayed, just smile or take a breath and bring yourself back to the moment. Your smile or breath will become the anchor that brings you back to the present moment. Just as the ship's anchor keeps the ship from straying too far from the anchored spot, so your smile or breath will constantly bring your thoughts back to what is happening in the moment. Keeping your thoughts anchored to the present moment is also known as being "fully present". There are many benefits in this practice. Choosing this option will give you the opportunity to discover these benefits for yourself.

1) Beginning with the week of Feb. 23-27 and continuing through the week of April 23, you will set aside one day out of each week for your "Mindfulness Day." You may choose any day each week as your day of mindfulness. You do not have to use the same day each week for your Mindfulness Day. You will figure out a way to remind yourself at the moment of waking that this day is your day of mindfulness. You might hang something on the ceiling or on the wall, a paper with the word "mindfulness" or a twig—anything that will suggest to you as you open your eyes and see it that today is your day of mindfulness. Today is your day. Remembering that, perhaps you can feel a smile or your own breath inhaling/exhaling, which affirms that you are in complete mindfulness, a smile or a breath that nourishes that perfect mindfulness.

While lying in bed, begin to slowly to follow your breath—slow, long, and conscious breaths. Then slowly rise from bed (instead of turning out all at once as usual), nourishing mindfulness by keeping your thoughts on each motion as you rise. Once up, then practice keeping your thoughts on each movement you make as you go through your regular routine of getting ready for the events of your day. **Whatever**

**you do, do it with intentional attention all day.** Constantly bringing your attention back to the present moment each time you discover that your attention has strayed by smiling to yourself or feeling your breath inhaling and exhaling and using that smile or breath as a reminder, an anchor to hold your thoughts in the present moment.

2) At the end of each of your “Mindfulness Days”, create an email journal entry. This journal entry will include your thoughts about your experience of being intentionally mindful for this day...what insights do you have, what stands out to you about the experience, list the ways this day was different for you than your regular days, what body sensations did you experience...what did you notice that you usually don’t notice...etc. This journal entry is not to be a list of the events of your day, but rather, a reflection on the way being mindful affected each event of your day. You will email your entry to [ssollowa@bloomu.edu](mailto:ssollowa@bloomu.edu). In the subject heading of your email journal entry, provide the week, day, and your name (See Research Option 1 Timeline for the Weeks and corresponding dates). For example:

Week A—Feb. 23—Sharon Solloway

You will provide eight journal entries, one for each of the eight weeks.

3) On Tuesday, April 27, you will bring a one-page, font 12, single-spaced reflection on your eight “Mindfulness Days” to class. See the Rubric for this Research Option in the syllabus for Performance Criteria.

❖ **Research Option 2--Doing: Study of Topics Related to the Content, Processes, and Structures of Literacy Classroom Practice**

**Part A--Web Research:** You will select a topic relevant to any of the readings listed for the semester. You will find three web sites that relate to your topic. You will be responsible for posting your research results using the “Discussion Board” function on our Blackboard website. Your selections should illuminate your topic in productive ways. **For each site you will include: the web address, a brief summary of the site, and a statement explaining the value of the site, contrasting it with your other two sites (total word count for EACH site description will be between 475-500 words for a total of 1424-1500 words for all three sites together).** The time and date of your posting is automatically recorded by Blackboard. Each individual will provide a self-evaluation of the learning for this assignment. Your self-evaluation will be one-single-spaced page, font size 12—and follow the same guidelines given for Literature Circle Reading Assignment Self-Evaluations. Both the Web Research postings and the accompanying Self-Evaluation will be evaluated following the criteria given in the Rubric for this assignment in the syllabus.

**Web Research and Self-Evaluation due by class time Thurs, Apr. 1**

**Part B--Web Responses:** Using the “Discussion Board” function on our Blackboard website, you will respond to three different class members’ “Web Research.” Your response should be thoughtful and connect with class readings/discussions/and/or personal experiences (**each of your** “Web Response” postings will be between 275-300 words). Your response should include how the information has affected your thinking. Check the Rubric for this assignment for criteria. **Web Responses are due by class time, Thurs, Apr. 27 (the time you post your response will be automatically recorded on Blackboard).**